# New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1945

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### THEATRE OPENINGS

"Carousel"

*Complete reviews appear in this issue*

*Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers*

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

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# "Carousel"

**Musical play, based on Ferenc Molnar's "Liliom," as adapted by Benjamin F. Glazer; music by Richard Rodgers; book and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein 2d; staging by Rouben Mamoulian; dances by Agnes de Mille; settings by Jo Mielziner; presented by the Theatre Guild at the Majestic Theatre, April 19, 1945.**

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
April 20, 1945

## *Guild Scores Again With Its 'Carousel'*

*Burton Rascoe was ill last night and unable to write a review of "Carousel."*

ALTHOUGH the Theater Guild may not have a second "Oklahoma!" on its hands, a consensus of critics and those who were fortunate enough to see "Carousel's" opening last night at the Majestic Theater is that Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein have created another beautiful musical play and one that again will keep the Guild's box office busy.

Hammerstein and Rodgers appear to have combined the successful device of "Carmen Jones"—the adaptation of a classic to modern scene and tempo—with the musical enthusiasm that was the outstanding quality of "Oklahoma!" and the result is happy.

As you know, "Liliom" was the story of a swaggering carnival barker in Hungary, led to the Devil's gates by force of circumstance and his own willfulness. Mr. Hammerstein has transposed the scene to New England, renamed his characters for the most part, and held fairly closely to the theme of the Molnar fantasy. He does permit his Liliom (in this case Billy Bigelow) to return to earth after his death, in order to accomplish one good deed.

**Follows Molnar Lines**

The long first scene, making certain allowances for American colloquialism, follows the Molnar lines almost line for line with the original. With the exposition out of the way, however, Mr. Hammerstein does pretty much as he chooses with the dialogue.

There are times when the music bears the distinct flavor of "Oklahoma!" particularly in the more spectacular ensembles, but that certainly is nothing against the play. "This Was A Real Nice Clam Bake," for example, which opens the first scene of the second act, is another of those rip-roaring choral numbers that is designed to lift the audience into a mood of exhilaration (like, for example, "Oh What a Beautiful Morning") and it accomplishes its purpose spectacularly.

**Cheerful Numbers**

"June is Bustin' Out All Over" is another cheerful number and so are "You'll Never Walk Alone" and "What's the Use of Wond'rin."

Last night's audience was appreciative of many things, among them the excellent diction and audibility of the words of Mr. Hammerstein's good lyrics, and the general excellence of the cast. John Raitt is the play's Liliom. He has a robust voice and musically is in character, although some of the critics would have enjoyed seeing a little more swagger in the acting.

Jan Clayton is a delightful Julia and has a pleasing voice. Jean Darling is Julie's friend and Eric Mattson is Jean's husband. They are all capable in the singing and acting departments.

Agnes DeMille, again the choreographer, has staged two principal dances, one a gay hornpipe, the other a ballet as seen by Billy as he looks down from heaven. As always, Miss DeMille has been imaginative and effective.

Richard Rodgers, who had injured his back recently, watched the performance from behind curtains, propped up in a stretcher.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
April 20, 1945

## *A Famous Team Scores Again*

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

CAROUSEL is a lovely and touching musical. More than that, it seems to me in some small sense an occasion in the theater. For this reworking of *Liliom* sufficiently believes in itself to tell its story with no obeisances to routine musical-comedy demands, and sufficiently understands its job not to sacrifice the prevailing mood to the predatory moment. That *Carousel* asserts its independence and achieves a kind of integration seems to me to count as much as that it so often has charm.

*Carousel* is rightly described as a "musical play" in the sense that the story is given its full weight and value. But the phrase "musical play" is possibly misleading, insofar as it may suggest something with less music content than a regulation musical show whereas *Carousel* actually has more. It possesses, indeed, a very great deal of music—some of it choral, some of it rather operatic, in the sense that it advances and interprets the story. But what matters most, the music is the best thing about *Carousel*. Mr. Rodgers has once again earned our gratitude—our gratitude for venturing to be different, our gratitude for continuing (on the whole) to be delightful. Some of his more operatic writing does not seem to me particularly successful. But his best songs, if not among his catchiest, are decidedly among his most charming. *June Is Bustin' Out All Over, If I Loved You* and *You'll Never Walk Alone* would grace any show. And there is a kind of sweetness to a good deal of the music that brings out what is touching in the play.

* * *

Mr. Hammerstein has done his part, too. Though *Carousel* is not exactly *Liliom*—and for other reasons than that it is laid in 19th-century New England instead of 20th-century Budapest— the story has been very little altered and the spirit of it not greatly changed. Liliom himself (here called Billy Bigelow) is not, to be sure, what he was in Molnar; he has lost much of his swagger and almost all of his Continental sinuousness, and is by that much the less interesting and colorful. But he remains the shame-faced sentimentalist who puts his worst foot forward, who beats his wife because he is afraid to show that he loves her; and is in that sense quite as touching. Mr. Hammerstein's book is simple without seeming over-simplified; it never shows off; it sticks to humor of character and eschews wisecracks; and is only culpable for sometimes being a little cute. Mr. Hammerstein has done very well with his lyrics, which again make no effort to dazzle, but fit the quality of the music and the tone of the play.

Miss de Mille's dances are all to the good also. Her first-act hornpipe has a wonderful liveliness and freshness; the second-act ballet is a very good one in what may be Miss de Mille's slightly too familiar style. Annabelle Lyon and Peter Birch do a capital job in the hornpipe, and Bambi Linn does a very nice one in the ballet.

* * *

As for the other performers, John Raitt plays Billy well enough, and sings the part remarkably well: no better young male voice has come to Broadway in several years. I thought that Jan Clayton made a touching and charming Julie, and liked Christine Johnson and Murvyn Vye in other parts. Jean Darling, as Julie's friend, sang well enough, but attempted a Celeste-Holmish manner that didn't come off. Jo Mielziner has done some attractive sets, and Miles White some bright period costumes. Mr. Mamoulian's direction is very helpful, and something should be said for Don Walker's orchestrations.

Since *Carousel*, like *Oklahoma!*, involves the Theatre Guild, Mr. Rodgers, Mr. Hammerstein, Mr. Mamoulian, Miss de Mille and Mr. White, I suppose a comparison between the two shows is inevitable. It is hardly, however, profitable; the two shows are not enough alike. The high spirits of *Oklahoma!*, the meadow freshness of it at its best, its fetching qualities as a "show" have no counterpart in *Carousel*; nor does *Carousel* have the same succession of tunes that quickly sing themselves into your memory. But *Carousel* has for me more charm; its story (familiar though it was) held me as *Oklahoma's* did not; and though it may not run for years and years, it may yet seem more of a milestone in the years to come.

**THE CAST**

| | |
|---|---|
| Carrie Pipperidge | Jean Darling |
| Julie Jordan | Jan Clayton |
| Mrs. Mullin | Jean Casto |
| Billy Bigelow | John Raitt |
| Juggler | Lew Foldes |
| 1st Policeman | Robert Byrn |
| David Bascome | Franklyn Fox |
| Nettie Fowler | Christine Johnson |
| June Girl | Pearl Lang |
| Enoch Snow | Eric Mattson |
| Jigger Craigin | Murvyn Vye |
| Hannah | Annabelle Lyon |
| Boatswain | Peter Birch |
| Arminy | Connie Baxter |
| Penny | Marilyn Merkt |
| Jennie | Joan Keenan |
| Virginia | Ginna Moise |
| Susan | Suzanne Tafel |
| Jonathan | Richard H. Gordon |
| 2d Policeman | Larry Evers |
| Captain | Blake Ritter |
| 1st Heavenly Friend | Jay Velie |
| 2d Heavenly Friend | Tom McDuffie |
| Starkeeper | Russell Collins |
| Enoch Snow Jr. | Ralph Linn |
| Louise | Bambi Linn |
| Carnival Boy | Robert Pagent |
| Principal | Lester Freedman |

NEW YORK SUN
April 20, 1945

## *'Carousel,' Beguiling Musical Play With Lovely Score, Opens at Majestic*

By WARD MOREHOUSE

THE THEATER GUILD, having struck gold on the south side of 44th street, now tries the north side and has come up with a new song-and-dance play, "Carousel," which has fragile beauty and an enchanting score. It opened last night at the Majestic and it will be around for a long, long time.

"Carousel," which used to be "Liliom," is a beguiling play. Richard Rodgers has contributed some of the loveliest music of his career. Oscar Hammerstein has written distinctive lyrics. And the Guild has crowded the stage with people who can sing this play, dance it and also speak it.

Molnar's story of the swaggering carousel barker who marries the gentle Julie, makes an attempt at robbery, commits suicide when trapped by the police and then returns to earth to see his daughter and whisper words long unspoken to his wife, has charm and compassion in musical play form. The Messrs. Rodgers and Hammerstein, with the aid of the imaginative staging of Rouben Mamoulian, have created a mood and have sustained it. And "Carousel" becomes something memorable in the theater.

The locale that was once Hungary is now the coast of New England, 1873-1888, and the production provides some beautiful interludes. Such as the amusement park prelude, crowded, colorful and gay, and done entirely in pantomine; the clambake scene along an island's jagged, misty shore, unfolded at the beginning of the second act, and the end-of-the-play scene showing the daughter of the wise and understanding Julie and the braggart Billy Bigelow (as Liliom is now called) in her graduation class, determined to hold up her head in the world.

The score of Richard Rodgers includes some outstanding numbers—"June Is Bustin' Out All Over," "This Was a Real Nice Clambake," "When I Marry Mr. Snow," "If I Loved You" and "You'll Never Walk Alone." Warm and tender and ingratiating music it is. Mr. Hammerstein's lyrics are frequently

stirring and in his book writing he has done well in the fitting of the dramatic material of the Molnar play to the framework of musical comedy.

The Theater Guild, getting wise in the ways of the song and dance field, has again called upon the talents of Rouben Mamoulian for production direction, of Agnes de Mille for staging of the dancing and Miles White for the fetching costumes. Jo Mielziner has contributed the atmospheric period settings. Mr. Mamoulian, who has a passion for the blending of song and dance with drama, has again achieved exciting stage groupings and effects.

The cast is not one of names, but it's one of abundant ability. John Raitt is the Billy Bigelow, and he has the bluster and certainly the voice for the role. Jan Clayton, also making her Broadway debut, is a completely delightful Julie. She is indeed welcome to Broadway. There are good performances from the exuberant Jean Darling, Eric Mattson and Jean Casto, as the tough old girl who owns the carousel. Christine Johnson has all the gusto in the world in putting over "June Is Bustin' Out All Over." Murvyn Vye, who has the appearance of a young Al Jolson, is excellent as the sly and sinister Jigger Craigin. Bambi Linn does extraordinarily well with her beach ballet. And there should be a word, or several of them, for the dancing of Peter Birch and the orchestrations of Don Walker.

"Carousel," a touching and affecting musical play, is something rare in the theater. It's a hit, and of that there can be no doubt. If it is not the musical piece to challenge "Oklahoma" for all-time honors it is certainly one that deserves its place in the 44th Street block. The team of Rodgers and Hammerstein will go on forever.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
April 20, 1945

## 'Carousel' Makes Bow At Majestic Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

YES, YES, a thousand times yes . . . When somebody writes a better musical-play than "Carousel," written by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein, Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein will have to write it. And when somebody produces a better musical play than "Carousel," produced by The Theatre Guild, The Theatre Guild will have to produce it.

This "Carousel," for which I'm deliberately going off the deep end, is the song-and-dance translation of the Ferenc Molnar "Liliom" which has been trying out in Boston. Transplanted from Budapest, Hungary, to Salem, Mass., it's not too far removed from the original. Like Cynara's boy-friend, it has been faithful after its fashion.

To go back and start at the beginning, "Carousel" opened last night at the Majestic. Opened triumphantly! For all I know to the contrary, the plush and gilded first-night congregation is still standing up in W. 44th st., applauding the score by Mr. Rodgers, the book and lyrics by Mr. Hammerstein and the dances by no other than Agnes de Mille.

Which is not to overlook the settings by Jo Mielziner, the costumes by Miles White and the all-over supervision of the tried and true Theatre-Guilders, who are Lawrence Langner and Theresa Helburn. As for the dances, Miss de Mille has again proved herself a genius.

**Billy and Julie**

Nowadays, with locale changed and songs and dances added, play names are not the same. Liliom is Billy Bigelow. Julie still is Julie, although Jordan has been added. Mrs. Muskat is Mrs. Mullen. Ficsur is Jigger. So it goes! But the story of "Carousel" and the story of "Liliom" are pretty close relations. It's the mood that differs.

Billy meets Julie. Julie meets Billy. And in an amusement park on the New England coast in the May of 1873. Then, on a tree-lined path along the shore. Again, married to Julie, in front of Nettie Fowler's Spa hard by the ocean. An island across the bay. A mainland water front, where murder is committed. Up there. Down here.

You remember how it went in the Garrick Theatre in April, 1921. And, later, up at the Fulton. Girl meets boy. Girl marries boy. Girl loses boy, only to find him after he has died. It's romance. It's comedy. It's melodrama. And it's metaphysical. To which somethings new have been added. Songs which are lovely. Dances which are marvelous.

You'll be hearing these songs, over and over again. "You're a Queer One, Julie Jordan." "When I Marry Mr. Snow." "June Is Bustin' Out All Over." "Blow High, Blow Low." "You'll Never Walk Alone." "That Was a Real Nice Clam Bake." "If I Loved You."

**No Complaints**

Casting is perfection. Jan Clayton, making her Broadway debut as Julie, is lovely to look at, lovelier to listen to. Her "What's the Use of Wond'rin'," along with her share in the duets, trios and ensembles, is perfection. She's a fine young actress, too. John Raitt, as Billy Bigelow, is in every way her equal. Both as a singer and an actor.

But there's neither time nor space to go into details in connection with a cast which could scarcely be improved upon. Jean Darling's Carrie Pipperidge, Eric Mattson's Enoch Snow, Christine Johnson's Nettie Fowler, Jean Casto's Mrs. Mullen, Murvyn Vye's Jigger Craigin, Bambi Linn's Louise, Peter Birch's Boatswain and Annabelle Lyon's Hannah are tops.

A professional fault-finder by trade, I can't find anything to complain about where The Theatre Guild's latest musical play is concerned, although it is in me to wish mildly that the opening ballet, "Carousel," could be a wee bit longer, that the closing ballet, which has no programmed title, could be a wee bit shorter. But it doesn't really matter.

As one who sees no good reason for comparing "Carousel" with "Oklahoma!," as one who prefers to let each stand on its perfected own, let me assure you that The Theatre Guild's new play-with-music is romantic, melodramatic, fantastical, colorful, comic, tragic, melodic and an evening of sheer theatrical enchantment.

NEW YORK POST
April 20, 1945

## 'Carousel' Is Closer to 'Oklahoma' Than to 'Liliom'

By WILELLA WALDORF

ALTHOUGH "Carousel," which opened at the Majestic last night, is billed as a musical version of Ferenc Molnar's "Liliom," the Theatre Guild has made every effort to establish it in the minds of Broadway theatre-goers as the logical successor to "Oklahoma," its fabulous hit still playing just across 44th Street.

The locale of Molnar's play has been shifted from Budapest to the Maine Coast back in the seventies and eighties, substituting old-time American folksiness and cute Agnes DeMille ballets for Molnar's swaggering Continental fantasy about a tough side-show barker in a Hungarian amusement park who is loved by a simple little servant girl, dies committing a robbery, is tried in a celestial police court, spends sixteen years in purgatory and is finally allowed a day back on earth to show his repentance by performing one kind act.

**The "Oklahoma" Graduates**

Miss DeMille isn't the only "Oklahoma" alumna involved in "Carousel." Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein 2d are again responsible for the music and the book and lyrics, respectively. The production was directed by Rouben Mamoulian. Miles White designed the quaint old-fashioned costumes and several of the singers and dancers are graduates of "Oklahoma" companies, either on Broadway or the road.

Some of the people who never happened to take part in "Oklahoma" could easily wander across the street and mingle with the boys and girls at the St. James without causing undue comment. A number of the roles seem to have been cut off the same bolt of cloth.

The question that arises today, therefore, is not so much is "Carousel" a satisfying musical version of "Liliom" as it is: How does the show shape up as a new "Oklahoma"?

The answer is that it is no "Liliom" and also no "Oklahoma," but that it will doubtless have a nice, hefty run on the strength of both of its predecessors' reputations.

Most admirers of "Liliom" will probably miss the Continental tang of Molnar's work, especially the wry comedy of the heavenly police court scene, which is by-passed at the Majestic. And "Oklahoma" addicts will find that although Miss DeMille and her talented dancers are still going through most of the same motions, there is even less to laugh at here, while Mr. Rodgers has composed a score that is more musicianly but less "popular" than his "Oklahoma" parade of hits.

This reviewer found the music in "Carousel" often very fine to listen to, as beautifully orchestrated by Don Walker and played by an excellent orchestra under Joseph Littau, but there is no doubt that it is not the sort of score one goes out humming. We must admit, too, that "Carousel" is no great vocal treat. Several of the Rodgers melodies might have proved more haunting if "sold" by cleverer singers.

**Jan Clayton Appealing**

The most attractive and talented member of the company is a newcomer from the movies named Jan Clayton, who plays Julie. She hasn't much of a voice, but she has an appealing personality, a strong feeling for the stage and a sense of style that is decidedly promising.

For the rest, John Raitt sings better than most and swaggers effectively enough as the New England Liliom, Murvyn Vye gets something out of the role of his pal Jigger and Eric Mattson has a decent tenor. Russell Collins does wonders in a couple of small roles along toward the end.

Jean Casto is pretty well smothered in the role Helen Westley once played and Jean Darling is cute but certainly no vocalist. On the other hand, the only trained singer among the women principals, Christine Johnson, is certainly no actress. Bambi Linn, the charming young "Oklahoma" dancer, not only dances now, but speaks as well.

"Carousel," which started promptly at 8:15 and ended at 11 o'clock, seemed to us rather a long evening. The "Oklahoma" formula is becoming a bit monotonous, and so are Miss DeMille's ballets. All right, go ahead and shoot.

NEW YORK TIMES
April 20, 1945

## 'Carousel'

By LEWIS NICHOLS

RICHARD RODGERS and Oscar Hammerstein 2d, who can do no wrong, have continued doing no wrong in adapting "Liliom" into a musical play. Their "Carousel" is on the whole delightful. It spins and whirls across the stage of the Majestic, now fast and rousing, now nostalgic and moving. To it, the composer of the team has brought one of the most beautiful Rodgers scores, and the lyricist some of his best rhymes. The Theatre Guild, offering the play as its farewell to the season and on its twenty-sixth birthday ,has given it an excellent production, with Rouben Mamoulian to direct, and Agnes de Mille for the dances. The Majestic is across the street from the St. James, where "Oklahoma!" is stationed; the pair of Rodgers-Hammerstein shows will be able to wink at one another for a long time to come.

• • •

In deciding to make a musical play of Ferenc Molnar's "Liliom," the pair automatically adopted a couple of heavy millstones. One is "Oklahoma!" and they got around that by not trying to imitate themselves. The other is the familiarity most audiences have with "Liliom." This they conquered by following the story quite closely as to incident, changing only the time and locale. "Carousel" is set on the New England coast toward the end of the nineteenth century. Its principal figure still is a barker in